

Allies

by Tiquismiquis

Category: Fire Emblem

Genre: Family, Hurt-Comfort

Language: English

Characters: Camilla, Xander

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-04-10 02:01:27

Updated: 2016-04-10 02:01:27

Packaged: 2016-04-27 20:54:18

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,616

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Camilla sees Father only once with Xander, in some tactics discussion as she passed the throne room, but they were smiling then, and Father even reached over to ruffle Xander's curls. But she hasn't forgotten.

Allies

Notes: Two things in Fates break my heart: 1) All of Garon's children are obviously terrified of him, but Xander is the only one (afaik) who outright admits to itâ€"multiple times, over support conversations and DLC textâ€"and classifies his father as the #1 most frightening thing in his life. So even though life was hell for all the Nohr royals, I can't help but imagine that there was a particular pressure on the crown prince.

2) The presentation of Camilla. Underneath all the fanservice I think she's an excellent characterâ€"observant, subtle, prudent, motherly, brave-and it tears me up that yet another female character exists so blatantly for fanservice rather than development and plot. I'm used to this franchise handing me Lyns and Eirikas and Elincias and Micaiahs, so I'm pretty let down here. (TL;DR I wanted Camilla content and Xander needs hugs and oops an exploratory fic happened.)

So nobody seems to know how long the Concubine Wars spanned/when they ended but let's pretend this fic happens shortly after they've died down, when everything's pared down to the Nohr siblings we all know and Garon has just recently succumbed to Goopface McBlorp. Let's also pretend Gunter is the jeigan that trained all the sibs in fighting because I didn't want to make up someone else.

(Thanks Dame for letting me metaphorically roll around on the ground and complain at you, and thanks to Manna for reading over.)

* * *

><p>Camilla has reached the age where she likes to pay attention to her face. It's a pretty face, she thinks. After her baths she plucks and powders and learns how to accentuate her favourite parts of herself: the soft curve of her jaw, her long eyelashes, how her hair falls. She often searches the faces of her remaining siblings when they aren't watching, taking comfort in the features that match hers, trying to justify the ones that don't.<p>

So it startles her when, passing Xander in the hallway, she sees the bruise before the curls and the pouting mouth they share. In the dusky half-light of the afternoon, it flares violet over his sharp cheekbone like a Nohrian battle flag. Before she can manage a pleasantries she blurts,

"What's that from?"

"Training," he answers curtly, and passes with a long stride. She turns and watches him fade off through the stripes of grey the windows make on the corridor floor.

What were you doing practicing without a helmet? she wonders, but when she asks Gunter about it that afternoon at her own practice, a bit of puzzlement sinks into the old soldier's usual frown. He tells her Prince Xander hadn't trained that morning. He'd been called to an audience with his lord father.

Her guts ache before Gunter even lands his first hit.

* * *

><p>The days slip away uneventfully. She sees Father as sparsely as usual, but when she does he gives her a beautiful jewelled pin for her hair. She sees him only once with Xander, in some sort of tactics discussion as she passed the throne room, but they were smiling, and Father even reached over to ruffle Xander's curls. His bruise has faded completely.<p>

But she never forgets. As the wars shift in focus from concubines to other nations, Father speaks brutally to his advisors while he mercifully pardons old criminals; Leo makes a fortress of the library and pillows of his tomes; Elise trails healers, holding the hands of the dying soldiers, learning how to clean the wounds of the survivors, tiny fingers bloody, tiny stomach iron. Everything feels changed to Camilla, but when she thinks about it, really thinks, she can't remember the changes happening or what anything was like before.

Perhaps she's just foolish. Perhaps a little mad, like so many are when they return from war. But even so, Camilla knows the change inside of her is real: she's wary now, alert. It lasts for hours, stretches for days, until it's simply another part of her personality, but one she knows wasn't there originally.

And the day finally comes: the day a city near the border of Hoshido revolts against Father's rule. When the messenger arrives at dinner with the news, Father throws his wine glass at him so hard that it shatters on the man's breastplate. It's rare that they all eat together at the table, and usually a joyous occasion, but this time they all still. Leo intently stirs his stew with his spoon. Elise

lets out a high gasp and Camilla grips her knee under the table to shush her. Father stands at once and tosses the cloth from his lap into his half-finished dinner.

"Xander. To the war room. It's time to learn how a king deals with rebellion."

"Yes, Father."

Xander stands and follows him, stiff-backed and unflinching, and doesn't make eye contact with any of them. Leo lets out a slow breath and takes a slower bite. Elise stares after Xander until Camilla leans close and murmurs,

"Eat, love. Weren't you telling me about the adventures you and Effie had today?"

She watches her siblings return to their meal, leans her cheek upon her hand as if she's listening hard. She ignores the servants who scramble to pick up the broken glass and dab at the messenger's stained tunic. It's more important to come up with a good plan.

* * *

><p>After Elise and Leo are fed and have retired to their rooms, Camilla begins her preparations.<p>

The kitchen boy on duty is almost too easy. He gives her what she wants at once, eyes flickering between her face and low neckline while she tries not to look amused. It takes a little more hip-swaying and hair-twirling to convince the old cleric still awake in the healer's ward, but eventually he, too, hands her what she asked for.

She puts everything on a cast-iron tray and hurries down the dark corridors as quietly as she can, pausing to listen at every corner. Curfew rules are strict in the castle and it will be hard to explain what she's doing.

But she makes it to Xander's room without encountering anyone. She has an excuse prepared for his servants, but when she cracks open the door, she finds his chambers silent and pitch black. She grips the metal handles of the tray as she eases inside and nudges the door shut behind her.

For a moment she only stands there, back against the door, and lets her eyes adjust. Xander's bedroom is enormous but sparse. His desk has only neatly-stacked parchment on its surface, and though his bed has the same velvet curtains as hers, it has none of the lacy pillows. He must have dismissed his servants for the nightâ€”for several nights, she realizes, judging by the tangled sheets upon it. The thought is hardly comforting.

Camilla sets the tea tray on his bedside table and then sits at the foot of the unmade bed to wait for him without lighting a candle. If a servant does come in after all, she wants the chance to scramble under the bedskirt before she gets caught. (And she must admit, the idea of sitting there in the darkness like a ghost and startling her unflappable older brother is amusing).

It feels like an hour before he slips in, a lanky silhouette, not enough muscle built yet to make his height look imposing. Camilla sits and watches him shuck shadows of fabric: cloak, surcoat, tunic. He carefully hangs each in the wardrobe and smooths out their wrinkles, and then the elbows of his form point out as he unbuttons his shirt with odd slowness. She waits until he's hung that up too while she wonders how to speak up, what to say. Maybe her fears are unfounded. But then he goes to his desk and lights the candelabra, throwing vivid light across his torso.

"Xander," she hisses. It's not amusing at all when he whirls to face her.

"What are you doing here?" he demands. He's unabashed, completely in control despite his swollen lip, but when her eyes stick there he seems to remember it and turns his face away. He can't do anything to hide his chest so he sets his shoulders stiffly back, as if he hardly cares that she sees.

He's covered in angry red splotches, most already darkening to bruises. Camilla has completed enough of her training to see the story they tell: his ribs first, catching him in a weak spot, and then his shoulders and forearms as he'd tried to defend himself. For the first time in months, she thinks she could cry. She wonders if she remembers how.

"You should be asleep," he says when she doesn't answer him. He pulls the circlet from his hair and starts on his own bedtime ritual, half-stalking to the basin to wash his face. "You know better than to leave your rooms at night. Hurry and get back, now."

"Xander, what happened."

"I already told you. I was training."

"After curfew?"

He straightens, gingerly drying his face with the soft towel draped over the basin's side. When he speaks his voice is cold and distant:

"Go back to your rooms or I will drag you there myself."

"Ah, but then your tea will get cold," Camilla purrs, unintimidated, and Xander pauses.

"What tea?"

She pats the space beside her on the bed before she rises and goes to his bedside table. Once she lights the candle there it reveals everything: the tray, a hot porcelain teapot painted with purple roses, one cup and one saucer, a little tin canister and a larger wooden jar. Slowly, Xander sets the towel down and sits where she'd indicated.

"What's all this?"

She continues to ignore him, spooning chamomile and lemongrass from the tin into the teapot. Silence fills the room—edged with his curiosity, but easy nonetheless—and then the sweet, comforting

scent of the herbs follows. She pours him a cup and brings it to him with the saucer.

"I just thought I would do something nice for you," she says finally, as her eyes flick over his new bruises again. "Since you've been training so hard."

She makes no move to hide the disbelieving drawl in her voice. His jaw tightens, probably annoyance at being seen through, before he answers,

"It's kind of you, but not at all necessary. I made a tactical error tonight and only reap what I sow. The crown prince of Nohr should be cleverer."

Camilla's disagreement burns hot and bright in her throat, but she swallows it down. She just goes back to the bedside table and returns with the wooden jar. Xander's hand is tight around the cup, but he hasn't drunk, and only eyes her hard. Though it stings, she understands. She plucks the tea from him and takes a slow, deliberate first sip before she hands it back. His eyes drop as he lifts it to his own lips.

"This is good," he murmurs into the cup.

"Soothing?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad." She unscrews the lid of the wooden canister then, and the sharper scent of parsley and comfrey overcomes the chamomile. Those herbs alone, ground into a salve, would be enough to reduce swelling, but the healing magic infused within it—"making it glow just slightly in the candlelight"—will feel especially soothing, she knows. "You just relax and drink that, and I'll start on your bruises. You can help me when you're done."

"Camilla," he says sternly when he realizes what she's rubbing into his shoulder. She presses just a little harder in defiance. He doesn't wince. "The magic salves are saved for the soldiers who recover from battle in the castle."

"That will be you someday soon. I'm just a little ahead of the game, that's all."

"Don't waste this on me."

"It's not a waste."

She pulls back to give him the glare she's seen him dole out a thousand times: outraged, unflinching. It works. For the first time in their lives, she's caught him vulnerable, and his eyes flick back to his lap.

"Please forgive me," he says quietly. "I didn't want you to know."

"I know all your weaknesses by now," Camilla replies, moving to the next bruise, "and you're still quite alive. You don't need to hide such things from me."

"That's not why. I didn't want to cause you any more worry."

"Oh, darling. That's just too bad, because I don't want you to carry this alone." When she finishes, she screws the lid back onto the jar of salve and bends to hide it under his bed, for later. "So I suppose we'll just have to continue like this. You can be as stubborn as you like, and I'll just keep sneaking in with nice teas on your bad days. Doesn't that sound lovely?"

"It won't happen again." Conviction returns to Xander's voice. "I'll be better, next time. Worthy."

After tea and salve, Camilla finds her hands completely empty. There's nothing she can do but close her eyes hard and hope he's right.

She hears him rise, and when she opens her eyes again, finds him reaching for his cloak.

"Come," he says. "I'll walk you back."

* * *

><p>It's less nerve-wracking, returning to her rooms with Xander. Even with what she's just seen, she can't help but think of him as invincibleâ€"or at least, too old and strong, too legitimate for a curfew, though she knows it isn't true. When they're standing before her door, she's surprised at the emotion he fits into three simple words:<p>

"Thank you, Camilla."

She doesn't reply. Since his bruises should be nearly healed, she pulls him into the warmest hug she can manage.

He hesitates, but eventually wraps his arms around her, too; even leans his cheek against her hair. She savours it, feeling oddly sentimental. Xander and Leo don't accept embraces very often anymore, though she and Elise try to make up the deficit.

They don't speak when they let go. Xander just turns and sneaks back off to his rooms, and Camilla leans against the door she's shut behind herself. She still feels tangled and like she's been of little help, and that a future where her siblings won't flinch at the dinner table is impossible to hope for. But at least now Xander knows he has an ally.

And once she's dressed for bed, the note she finds under one of her pillows shows her that she has some of her own. It's a rendition of her name in the beautiful calligraphy Leo has been studying lately, and beneath, a messy picture of her face, and a great number of hearts that serve as a signature while Elise is still learning her letters. She puts it carefully in her bedside drawer and climbs beneath the blankets, letting the tension melt from her body and into the mattress.

They are the victors. They've survived this long, and they'll continue to survive. Not unscathed, she's sure, but together, at least. She'll make sure of it.

End
file.